

yellowthroated marten *Martes flavigula* and with apparently no history of marmot occurrence (C. Lachungpa, *pers. comm.*). However, it is interesting to note that two may have survived the ordeal, and it is an indication that marmot life span in the wild could be at least eight years.

Feb. 27, 2001 USHA GANGULI-LACHUNGPA  
BISHNU LAL SHARMA  
*Department of Forests,  
Environment & Wildlife,  
Government of Sikkim, Deorali,  
Gangtok 737 102, Sikkim, India.*

## 5. TWO WHALE RECORDS FROM TAMIL NADU, SOUTHERN INDIA

Recently, the media reported two different occurrences of a large whale running aground in Tamil Nadu.

The first of these instances took place in November 2000. Newspapers and television channels reported that a whale was stranded near Point Calimere. Their accounts said that the whale was stuck in mud and that it had been languishing there for 40 days or more. On November 14, the Coast Guard and others attempted to rescue the stricken animal and I was able to witness this effort from close quarters.

The whale was stranded in *c.* 1.25 m water at a location south of Point Calimere that took about an hour to reach by trawler. The bottom was clayey, and the water was quite brown and muddy. Further, the only parts of the whale that appeared frequently above the surface were its blowhole and snout. Nevertheless, over the course of the operation to save the creature, I was able to note the following features:

**Shape:** slender and long.

**Length:** about 12 m, roughly equal to that of the trawlers used to move it.

**Dorsal fin:** triangular, backward slanting, about 30 cm high; trailing edge frayed. Placed at about two-thirds the total length of the whale, from the snout.

**Tail flukes:** large.

**Flippers:** could not be seen.

**Colour:** black overall; belly white, possibly a little pink. Large white scars on the back between the blowhole and the fin.

**Rostral ridges:** three distinct longitudinal ridges running from the blowhole towards the

tip of the snout, the middle one considerably more raised than the other two.

On the basis of these observations, I identified the stranded whale to be a Bryde's whale *Balaenoptera edeni*. The three ridges on the top of the head are diagnostic (Jefferson *et al.* 1993, Leatherwood and Reeves 1983, Watson 1981).

The second whale came ashore near Poothurai village of Kanyakumari district. On January 18, 2001, *The Hindu* carried an item about this whale. It said that a stranded whale was rescued by the villagers and officials, and had swum back to the sea. The Tamil newspaper *Dinakaran* carried a colour photograph of the whale on the same day, lying at the edge of the water. The caption said that the whale was "50 feet long and 10 feet high". According to this paper, the whale was entangled in fishermen's nets and was brought to the shore.

The snout and right side (front part) of the whale are visible in the published photograph. The whale was evidently a humpback *Megaptera novaeangliae*: it had the throat grooves or ventral furrows characteristic of a rorqual; its flipper appeared long and narrow, and it had the unmistakable knobs on top of the head. Further, no ridge was visible along the midline on top of the head, and the colour of the animal was black and white.

After intense search of the literature, I found only a few records of the Bryde's whale and humpback whale from India:

### Bryde's Whale

i) Date not known, recorded by Blanford

from the Bay of Bengal (De Silva 1987).

ii) July 2, 1979, a 13 m specimen washed ashore at Beypore, Calicut (Lal Mohan 1992).

iii) February 20, 1983, 13.52 m carcass found on an islet near Dhanushkodi Island, Gulf of Mannar (Lal Mohan 1992).

iv) April 14, 1982, Leatherwood (1984) observed 7 Bryde's whales on a cruise from Madras to Trincomalee.

### Humpback Whale

i) January 23, 1941, 14.7 m (49 ft) long whale stranded on the Anjengo coast near Quilon (Mathew 1948).

ii) January 15, 1988, 14.3 m long female specimen washed ashore near Kasaragod (Lal Mohan 1992).

iii) January 20, 1988, decomposed 15 m long female specimen found at Mavila Kadappuram, near Nileswaram, Kerala - drifted back into the sea after two days and appeared on January 24 at Thaikadappuram (Muthiah *et al.* 1988).

I am not able to determine whether the last two records refer to different specimens or just to one.

The limited information available on these species in India makes the present records noteworthy.

May 15, 2001 KUMARAN SATHASIVAM  
29 Jadamuni Koil Street,  
Madurai 625 001,  
Tamil Nadu, India.

### REFERENCES

- DE SILVA, P.H.D.H. (1987): Cetaceans (Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises) recorded off Sri Lanka, India, from the Arabian Sea and Gulf, Gulf of Aden and from the Red Sea. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 84(3): 505-525.
- JEFFERSON, T.A., S. LEATHERWOOD & M.A. WEBBER (1993): Marine Mammals of the World, FAO Species Identification Guide. United Nations Environment Programme, Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, Rome. Pp. 320.
- LAL MOHAN, R.S. (1992): Observations on the whales *Balaenoptera edeni*, *B. musculus* and *Megaptera novaeangliae* washed ashore along the Indian coast with a note on their osteology. *J. mar. biol. Ass. India* 34: 253-255.
- LEATHERWOOD, S. (1984): Further notes on cetaceans of Sri Lanka. Paper No. SC/36/06 presented to the International Whaling Commission Scientific Committee. 12 pp.
- LEATHERWOOD, S. & R.R. REEVES (1983): The Sierra Club Handbook of Whales and Dolphins. Sierra Club, San Francisco. 302 pp.
- MATHEW, A.P. (1948): Stranding of a whale *Megaptera nodosa* on the Travancore coast in 1943. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 47(4): 732-733.
- MUTHIAH, C., S. MOHAMMED, G. BHATKAL & B. MELINMANI (1988): On the stranding of a Humpback Whale in the North Kerala coast. *Mar. Fish. Infor. Serv. T & E Ser.* 85:12.
- WATSON, L. (1981): Sea Guide to Whales of the World. Hutchinson, London. Pp. 302.

### 6. A COMMENT ON THE REVIEW OF "PRIMATES OF NORTHEAST INDIA" PUBLISHED IN *JBNHS* VOL. 97(3)

With reference to the above-mentioned review, I would like to point out the following errors. The review of PRIMATES OF NORTHEAST INDIA, Srivastava (1999), by Gavand (2000) has failed to detect some serious errors. The main problem in this work lies in the maps and text. Zoogeographical complexities have made *faux pas* very difficult in Northeast India, e.g., the

River Brahmaputra and many of its tributaries such as the Dibang, Manas and Sankosh are effective barriers in the dispersal of many mammals.

The capped langur *Trachypithecus pileatus* does not occur between the Siang and Dibang rivers in Arunachal Pradesh, but the map on p. 163 shows as many as three sites in that region.